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O'Neil Farm Saved? Not So Fast

The good people at the Wildlands Trust office off West Street are a little jittery these days. Their apprehension concerns the renowned O'Neil Farm and the fundraising effort launched to acquire the property and forever retain it as a working dairy farm.

A capital campaign to raise \$4.3 million to buy the farm and establish a charitable trust to oversee its future has enjoyed some early success and received a major infusion from the voters of Duxbury who, at a special town meeting in June, approved spending \$1.5 million to acquire development rights to the property.

EDITORIAL

The farm sits on about 250 acres off Autumn and Winter Streets and has been in the family of Carl O'Neil for 150 years. In fact Carl, a former Duxbury fire chief and a dairyman to the depths of his bones, has pledged to donate \$1 million toward the preservation of the farm from his share of the \$4.3 million pricetag. He and the heirs of his late brother own the property. Carl's pledge, however, has one major condition: the deal must finish.

The immortal words of New York Yankee great Yogi Berra — "It ain't over 'til it's over" — come to mind here. Many Duxburyites, knowing that a special town meeting approved spending a large chunk of money to buy the farm, have assumed that the entire affair is a done deal, that the farm with its rolling acres and its barn with 70 cows and its 250-year-old house, are ours for generations. Forever.

Not so. Not unless the balance of the \$4.3 million is raised and raised quickly. The state Department of Agricultural Resources has pledged \$500,000, and foundation proposals are expected to yield another \$700,000. An additional \$1.1 million has been raised through private gifts with the lion's share coming from a single Duxbury resident. That leaves a deficit of about \$500,000 which must be collected by Aug. 31, when the heirs of Mr. O'Neil's late brother are due (overdue, actually) to collect their one-third share of the purchase price.

If the additional money needed is not forthcoming, a large chunk of the farm will be sold off, most probably for development, and we don't want that to happen. To see that it doesn't think about making a contribution to keep the South Shore's only dairy farm alive. Call the Wildlands Trust at 781-934-9018. Give anything you can and think about sponsoring a cow. There are still more than 50 left and if all were sold we would go a long way toward that \$500,000 shortfall.